POLITICS, SOCIETY AND CIVIL WAR IN WARWICKSHIRE, 1620–1660

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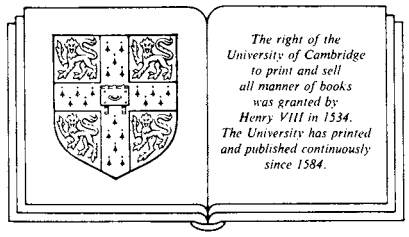

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The social context

County boundaries are no guides to social and economic characteristics. Although Warwickshire was a comparatively small county, it was split into several regions which often had more in common with the economies of neighbouring counties than they had with other parts of Warwickshire. This diversity is not simply a matter to be noted as 'background' but was an important influence on the social and political character of the county. All sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers agreed that the county was divided into two distinct parts: the forest region of 'Arden', north of the river Avon, and the fielden region to the south. Leland, for example, wrote:

> the most part of the shire of Warwick that lieth as Avon river descendeth on the right hand or ripe of it, is in Arden, (for so is the ancient name of that part of the shire); and the ground in Arden is much enclosed, plentiful of grass, but no great plenty of corn.
>
> The other part of Warwickshire that lieth on the left hand or ripe of Avon river, much to the south, is for the most part champion, somewhat barren of wood, but very plentiful of corn.[1]

The fielden was an area of mixed farming: barley, wheat and peas were grown, sheep kept and some dairying carried on though not on the same scale as in the north of the county.[2] To the south-east of this region lay the great sheep pastures on the heavy clay soils of the limestone belt, where the Spencers of Wormleighton and Althorpe in Northamptonshire had their estates. This region continued into the neighbouring county of Northamptonshire.[3] Though still largely open field in the mid seventeenth century, this was the part of the county that had undergone the

[1] L. Toulmin Smith, ed., *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, vol. 2 (1906–8), 47.

[2] Joan Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England' in Thirsk, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, 1967), 91.

[3] E.G.R. Taylor, 'Camden's England' in H.C. Darby, ed., *An Historical Geography of England before AD 1800* (Cambridge 1936), 370. For the Spencers: H. Thorpe, 'The Lord and the Landscape', *B.A.S.T.*, vol. 80 (1962), 38–77.

depopulating enclosures of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries: in Hodnell and Radbourne a shepherd or two were the only inhabitants remaining.[4] The south-west of the fielden from the Avon valley south to Edgehill and Oxfordshire was the granary of the county, one of the most fertile parts of England; an area, Camden wrote: 'whose fertile fields of corn and verdant pastures, yield a most delightful prospect'.[5] The division of the county into two farming regions is thus an oversimplification as was the use of the Avon as the boundary between them (see map 1). The evidence of glebe terriers suggests that the wood-pasture region did not begin immediately north of the Avon: villages like Arrow, Aston Cantlow, and Wootton Wawen between the Avon and the river Arrow to the north remained largely open field mixed farming areas.[6] Here, in the western Avon valley, agricultural improvement was encouraged and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw much piecemeal enclosure and the consolidation of holdings. Wasperton was enclosed in 1664; Charlecote between 1635 and 1714; the glebe at Hampton Lucy was already in large pieces by the sixteenth century.[7] In the eastern Avon valley, on the higher country of the east Warwickshire plateau and Dunsmore Heath, the soil was poorer and the region, like the adjacent parts of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, was given over mainly to sheep farming and grazing. Rugby was thus 'a market town abounding with butchers'.[8] Enclosure was common here too, and in 1607 had contributed to the violent struggle of the Midlands revolt when some 3,000 villagers from Warwickshire and the two adjacent counties had risen against the decay of tillage, the lack of work and high grain prices. By the mid seventeenth century however, enclosure was carried out mainly by agreement as at Clifton on Dunsmore in 1650 and Frankton in 1656.[9]

[4] W.C. Tate, 'Enclosure Acts and Awards Relating to Warwickshire', *B.A.S.T.*, vol. 65 (1943–4), 45–104. *V.C.H.*, vol. 6: 198, 114.

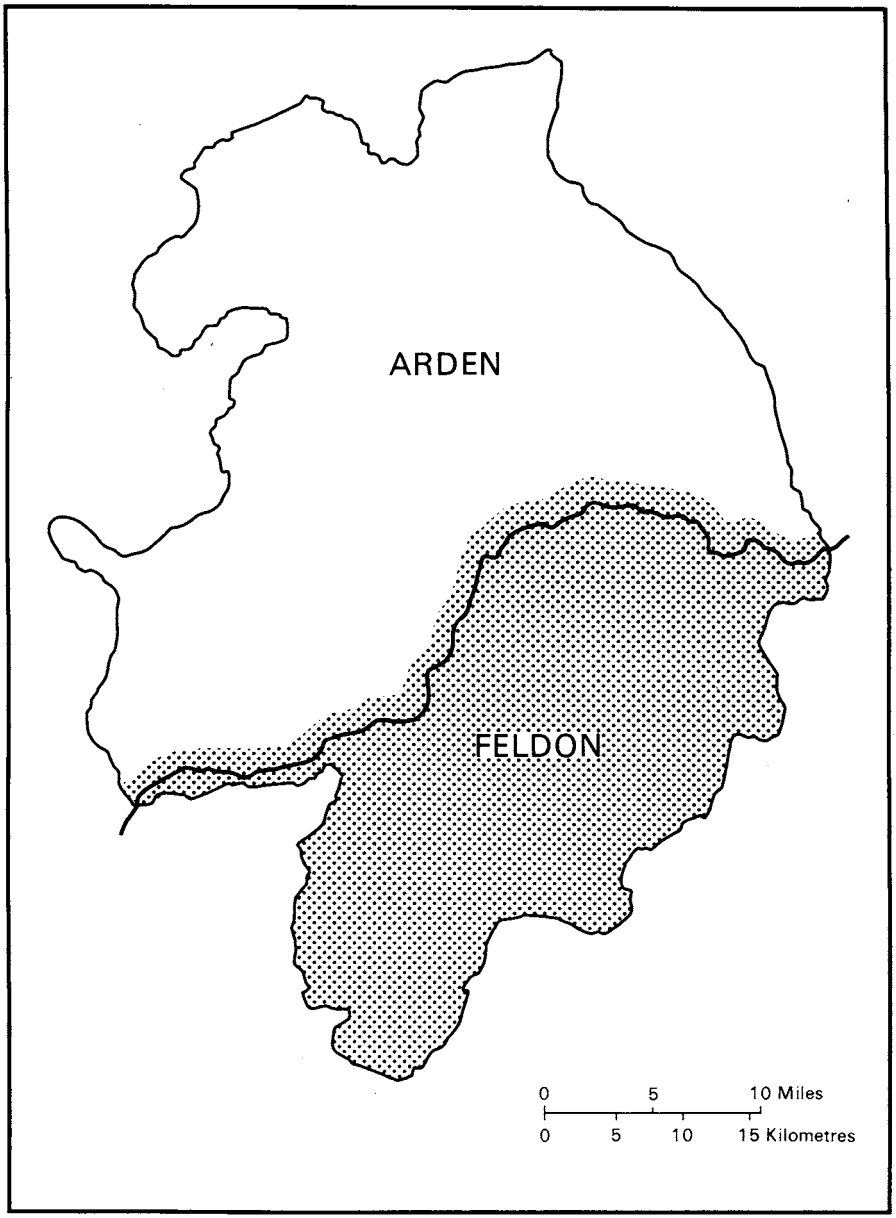
[5] J.N.L. Barker, 'England in the Seventeenth Century' in H.C. Darby, ed., *Historical Geography*, 403. William Camden, *Brittannia*, vol. 1 (1722), 598.

[6] D.M. Barratt, ed., *Ecclesiastical Terriers of Warwickshire Parishes*, vol. 1 (Dugdale Society, 22, 1955), liii–liv.

[7] D.M. Barratt, 'The Enclosure of the Manor of Wasperton in 1664', *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, vol. 3 (1952), 138–52. Barratt, *Ecclesiastical Terriers*, vol. 1: 74–5, 100–1.

[8] A.W. Macpherson, *Warwickshire* (1946), Part 62 of L. Dudley Stamp, ed., *The Land of Britain: the Report of the Land Utilization Survey of Britain*, 663; Thirsk, 'Enclosing and Engrossing', in Thirsk, ed., *Agrarian History*, 232. Camden, *Brittannia*, 601.

[9] Thirsk, 'Enclosing and Engrossing', 233. E.F. Gay, 'The Midland Revolt and the Inquisitions of Depopulation of 1607', *T.R.H.S.* new series, vol. 18 (1904), 195–244. A. Gooder, *Plague and Enclosure: A Warwickshire Village in the Seventeenth Century* (Coventry and Warwickshire History Pamphlets no. 2, Birmingham, 1965), for Clifton on Dunsmore. *V.C.H.*, vol. 6: 92 (Frankton). Tate, 'Enclosure Acts', 71 gives other examples of enclosure in this area: Bilton, Cosford, Brownsover.



1 The river Avon and farming regions

North of the Avon valley was the area of the old forest of Arden, though by the mid seventeenth century changes in agriculture and the growing iron industry around Birmingham had led to the disappearance of much of the timber. In the early sixteenth century the sandy infertile soil had supported a mainly pastoral economy, but the succeeding century had seen rapid change. The growing demand for food as the population doubled and industrial areas in particular expanded, had stimulated the development of a more complex agriculture. Indeed, Skipp's study of five Arden parishes reveals that agricultural improvement was vital in maintaining a steady population increase up to the mid seventeenth century after a serious 'ecological disequilibrium' in the 1610s when resources were strained by earlier and rapid population growth. Through the use of marling and convertible husbandry rather than merely through extension of the cultivated area, mixed farming developed. The basis of this new agriculture was dairying, although sheep were still kept and an increasing amount of cereals grown.[10] Camden believed that when he wrote the Arden was already self-sufficient in corn; and Walter Blyth, writing in 1649, used his native Arden to illustrate the achievements of a more enterprising agriculture:

> why do men give double rents to till and plough above what they do to graze, and if thou art not satisfied, consider but the woodlands who before enclosure, were wont to be relieved by the fielden, with corn of all sorts, And now are grown as gallant corn countries as be in England, as the western parts of Warwickshire and the northern parts of Worcestershire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and all the countries thereabouts.[11]

The diversity of the county's economy was matched by differences in social structure and relationships. In the fielden and the western Avon valley the nucleated village was the typical community; society was close knit, traditional and highly manorialised. The pattern of settlement in the Arden remained that of a forest, slowly cleared and settled by individuals or families rather than by communities. A traditional open-field system had never existed in the Arden: much of the arable land had always been enclosed, and where open fields were present, their pattern was highly irregular. Enclosure continued throughout the seventeenth century, usually undertaken by gentry in co-operation with yeomen and richer husbandmen. Medieval Arden had had more freeholders and lighter labour services than the south of the country and in the sixteenth and

[10] Murray, *General View*, 17–18. Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, 94–6, 211. V.H.T. Skipp, 'Economic and Social Change in the Forest of Arden 1530–1649' in Joan Thirsk, ed., *Land, Church and People: Essays Presented to Professor H.P.R. Finberg* (British Agricultural History Society, Reading, 1970), 84–111; Skipp, *Crisis and Development: An Ecological Case Study of the Forest of Arden 1570–1674* (Cambridge, 1978), 38–54.

[11] Camden, *Brittannia*, 597. Walter Blyth, *The English Improver* (1649), 72.

seventeenth centuries it remained an area where landholding and wealth were comparatively broadly dispersed and where the moderately wealthy could prosper.[12] Smaller freeholders did as well as richer yeomen and gentry in the era of rising prices and stable rents after 1540; and such men profited also from the industrial developments of the Arden. In the mid seventeenth century the Arden was a broader based society than the south where there were more rich yeomen and gentry: the north had fewer rich but more landless poor amongst its larger population. The century of rising prices and rapid economic change had its social cost in the Arden, bringing increasing polarisation within local society and the creation of a landless proletariat. By the 1660s, 40% of the inhabitants of Skipp's parishes were landless labourers; their numbers are almost equal to the population rise since the 1570s.

Similarly, Martin's analysis of the Hearth Tax reveals higher levels of poverty in the north than in most fielden parishes.[13] Most of the greater gentry lived in the south of the county, and they occupied the pinnacle of a tightly knit hierarchical society, very different from the more open, mobile society of the Arden. Differences in social relations can be indicated by an analysis of the manorial structure in different parts of the county. Thirsk and Spufford have pointed to the importance of 'open villages' as stimulators of economic change and cradles of religious radicalism.[14] With this in mind, the parishes of Warwickshire have been examined to see how many manors they contained; whether manorial rights had lapsed or were disputed; and whether the lord of the manor was resident (see table 1). Significant differences emerge between the north and south of the county. Thus in the Arden Hundred of Hemlingford only fourteen out of forty-two parishes comprised a single manor with a lord who lived nearby, while several large parishes contained as many as seven or eight manors.[15] The pattern in Knightlow Hundred, in the east and south-east of the county, was similar. Authority here was remote and often divided while the parish church, too, was frequently far away. The result seems to have been a less deferential society to which the social

[12] Thirsk, *Agrarian History*, 88–98; R.H. Hilton, *The Social Structure of Warwickshire in the Middle Ages* (Dugdale Society, Occasional Paper, 1950), 12–26. In 1632 Solihull manor had seventy-five freehold, five copyhold and nine leasehold tenures: Skipp, *Crisis and Development*, 45–6.

[13] *Ibid*, 78–82; J.M. Martin, 'The Parliamentary Enclosure Movement and Rural Society in Warwickshire', *Agricultural History Review*, vol. 15 (1967).

[14] Joan Thirsk, 'Seventeenth Century Agriculture and Social Change' in Thirsk, ed., *Land, Church and People*, 148–77; Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), 313. Religious dissent in Cambridge was found typically in large villages, split between several manors.

[15] V.H.T. Skipp and R.R. Hastings, *Discovering Bickenhill* (Birmingham University Department of Extra-Mural Studies, 1963), 8–9: Bickenhill in Hemlingford Hundred included seven manors.

mobility caused by rapid economic change and population growth contributed. The actions of the independent 'middling sort' of the Arden were vitally important in Parliament's taking control of the county in 1642 despite the royalism or neutralism of many of the greater gentry.[16] In contrast, more parishes in Barlichway Hundred, centred on the western Avon valley, and in the mainly fielden Hundred of Kineton were made up of close-knit communities where the leading landowners could more easily exert control. In two-thirds of the parishes of Barlichway, and over half those of Kineton there was a single manor with a resident lord; here people attended the same parish church and the same manorial court along with their neighbours and were in intimate contact with their local leading landowners. In these southern areas too, economic changes had been less profound, leaving a society where traditional landmarks remained more intact.

The population of Warwickshire rose by some 90% between the 1560s and the 1660s, a rise similar to the latest estimates of national trends. In the 1563 Diocesan returns for the county 8,950 families were listed; the households exempt and assessed in the 1664 Hearth Tax numbered 17,100, giving a population estimate for the 1660s of some 80,000.[17] Neither the rise in population nor its distribution was evenly proportioned throughout the county. The Warwickshire figures illustrate Thirsk's conclusion that population rose fastest in 'open village areas with possibilities of industrial employment'. Such open villages were not able to discourage immigration as closed, highly manorialised communities were; the problems of food supply and underemployment consequent on a rising population were a stimulus to a more labour intensive and productive agriculture, and to the development of rural industries.[18] Thus

[16] See chapter 4 below. Areas similar to the Arden in economic and social structure and in political initiative were found in Somerset and in the Durham uplands: David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum* (Newton Abbot, 1973), 116–17; M. James, *Family, Lineage and Civil Society: A Study of Society, Politics and Mentality in the Durham Region 1500–1640* (Oxford, 1974), 128. See Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660* (Oxford, 1985) for a full discussion, based on the west country, of regional contrasts in environment, culture and politics.

[17] 1563 figures are from B.L. Harl. MS 594 (Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield); Harl. MS 595 (Diocese of Worcester); 1664 Hearth Tax: P.R.O. E179/259/10. In some parts of Warwickshire, particularly in Hemlingford and Knightlow Hundreds, Hearth Tax returns show considerable under-registration compared with later figures and so 1670 returns have been preferred in some cases (taken from *Hearth Tax Returns* vol. 1, M. Walker, ed. (Warwick County Records, Warwick 1957), table 5. A multiplier of 4.75 has been used to calculate population. National figures are from Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580–1680* (London, 1982), 122–3. A fuller discussion of Warwickshire's population can be found in appendix 1 of my doctoral thesis, 'Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire 1620–1650' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1980), 457–66. This appendix is the source of the detailed figures here.

[18] Joan Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside' in F.J. Fisher, ed., *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England in Honour of R.H. Tawney* (Cambridge, 1961); 'Agriculture and Social Change', 156–7.

Table 1 *'Open villages' by hundred*[a]

Hundred	Total parishes	With 2[b] manors	Parishes with 3 manors	With 4+ manors	Other open parishes: where manorial rights had been sold to freeholders; were disputed; or where the lord was not resident[c]
Barlichway	39	7(2)	4	2[d]	1
Hemlingford	42	7(1)	7(1)	9	5
Kineton[e]	52	12(3)	4(1)	2	5
Knightlow	59	18(4)	8	7(2)	4

[a] The information is taken from *V.C.H.* vols. 3–6; Dugdale, *Warwickshire* (1656) *passim.*

[b] The figures in brackets refer to parishes where manorial rights had also been sold or were disputed, or which had a non-resident lord.

[c] Where the lord of the manor lived in a neighbouring parish he is not counted as non-resident, so these are minimum figures. This column does not include parishes already contained in the previous categories.

[d] These parishes are that of Wootton Wawen on the fringe of the Arden, and the urban parish of Stratford-on-Avon.

[e] Kineton Hundred included three detached 'Arden' parishes: Lapworth, Tanworth and Packwood. They were all open.

in Hemlingford Hundred the population had risen by an average 125%, and by at least 140% in the industrial areas around Birmingham; in the 1670s the hundred supported 32.8 households, every 1,000 acres, making the old forest area the most densely populated part of the county. This picture is somewhat distorted by the heavily settled 'Black Country', for places like Shuttington and Newton Regis in the north-east supported many fewer families. The population of the mainly fielden Kineton Hundred, excluding Warwick borough, had risen by almost as much (121%) presumably because of the high productivity of its agriculture; but it was much less densely populated with 20.2 households per 1,000 acres, though its Arden parishes of Lapworth, Tanworth and Packwood all had a density of more than 30. The population of Barlichway Hundred had risen by only 77% but this highly efficient farming region had a population density of nearly 26 families per 1,000 acres. Knightlow Hundred contained the greatest variety of population distribution: from the two families per 1,000 acres in the sheep pastures of Radburn, Watergall and Hodnell to 136 in the coal-mining parish of Bedworth.[19]

The population rise in the north of the county had encouraged the move away from a pastoral economy to one based on dairying and arable farming, which produced more food and employed more labour. Equally, the expansion of industry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was both a response to the population rise and a contribution to the scale of that rise. Again the major developments took place in the north of the county where the necessary raw materials – coal and wood – were available; and the more open society encouraged immigration and gave room for enterprise to flourish.[20] By the early seventeenth century Birmingham was already the thriving marketing and credit centre of the Black Country covering southern Staffordshire, northern Worcestershire and north-western Warwickshire. This was one of the most prosperous iron smelting areas of the country, and Birmingham was, said Camden, 'swarming with inhabitants and echoing with the noise of anvils (for here are great numbers of smiths)', and Rowland's research indicates that in the 1650s over 60% of Birmingham's inhabitants were involved in trade, mainly in the metal-work industries.[21] By the late seventeenth century, with a population between 7,000 and 8,000, Birmingham was one of the larger urban areas in England whereas its population in the early

[19] The population of Knightlow Hundred had risen by 72.3% (1563–1664) or by 88% on 1670 figures. [20] Thirsk, 'Agriculture and Social Change', 167, 171.

[21] W.H.B. Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600–1838* (1953), 133–40. Camden, *Brittannia*, 609. Marie Rowlands, *Masters and Men: The West Midlands Metalware Trade Before the Industrial Revolution* (Manchester, 1975), 20, 1, 88; research based on probate inventories. Leland wrote in the early sixteenth century, 'a great part of the town is maintained by smiths': Leland, *Itinerary*, vol. 2: 97.

sixteenth century had been no more than 1,500. Its population in the mid seventeenth century was probably about 5,000. Nailmaking and cutlery were the main Birmingham trades, the work being done under the putting-out system, often on a part-time basis, but the organisation of the trades was coming increasingly into the hands of commercial capitalists who dominated marketing, and the great ironmongers who controlled the production of raw materials. Technological innovation facilitated such developments; the blast furnace was introduced in the Black Country in the second half of the sixteenth century; and from the 1620s the slitting mill, using water power to produce narrow rods of iron from bar iron, caused a dramatic rise in productivity in the nail-making industry, increasing capital investment and the number of large scale concerns.[22]

The Birmingham area thus underwent a great transformation in this period: new industrial methods and a greatly increased and mobile population produced a society very different from the more traditional rural areas. The local gentry, apart from leasing their land for mills, were not greatly involved in the iron industry; more typical were men who had made their own way in the world like John Jennens, the greatest of the Birmingham ironmongers and his brother Ambrose who marketed his product in London.[23] Birmingham had no resident lord of the manor from 1530 on, and in this relatively free society enterprising men found opportunities to make their fortunes in new ways and social relationships became increasingly based on commercial ties rather than deference and paternalism. This area, to contemporaries, was one where traditional loyalties seemed weaker. Birmingham's Puritan lectureship in the 1630s attracted listeners from the adjacent counties such as the future Presbyterian Thomas Hall of Kings Norton, Worcestershire, who regarded it as a formative experience in his life. In 1642 the royalist William Dugdale described the inhabitants as 'sectaries and schismatics' and saw their actions as vital in securing the county for Parliament.[24] Birmingham also had contacts much wider than the immediate local area: although much Black Country production was sold in the surrounding counties, Birmingham ironwares were sold as far afield as East Anglia by

[22] D.C. Coleman, *Industry in Tudor and Stuart England* (Studies in Economic and Social History, edited for the Economic History Society by M.W. Flinn, 1975), 33; Rowlands, *Masters and Men*, 153–4; Court, *The Rise of the Midland Industries*, 72–3, 83, 101, 107. The slitting mill was first introduced by Richard Foley in his Stourbridge, Worcestershire, works: R.H. Pelham, 'The Growth of Settlement and Industry c 1100–1700' in M.J. Wise, ed., *Birmingham and its Regional Setting: A Scientific Survey* (British Association, Birmingham, 1950), 154.

[23] Rowlands, *Masters and Men*, 12. *V.C.H.*, vol. 8: 83.

[24] Pelham, 'The Growth of Settlement and Industry', 152; R. Moore, *A Pearl in an Oyster Shell* (1675), (Hall's funeral sermon), 75. *Dugdale* (Hamper), 17. See also chapter 4 below.

the sixteenth century; and by the early seventeenth century the London Company of Ironmongers was casting uneasy glances at its Birmingham competitors.[25]

The county's other main industrial area also lay north of the Avon; the east Warwickshire coalfield stretching from Wyken on the outskirts of Coventry, north to Chilvers Coton on the outskirts of Nuneaton. Warwickshire coal, like Birmingham ironware, had a more than local market, despite the lack of water transport until the Avon was made navigable in the late seventeenth century. In 1631 the 'undertakers' of one of the main pits, at Bedworth, claimed: 'The greatest part of the counties of Warwick, Leicester, Northampton and Oxford have for many years past and still are furnished with coals from Bedworth.'[26] They gave employment they said to 120 men, on whom nearly 1,000 people depended; and indeed, in the 1660s, the coal industry made Bedworth a crowded and poor parish: in 1664 it included 294 households of whom 242 were too poor to pay the Hearth Tax.[27] Coal mining attracted only the adventurous for the risks, both physical and financial, and the technical problems were enormous. Such were two 'not quite' gentlemen, John Buggs of Bedworth and Thomas Robinson of London and Bedworth, who, together with William Rolfe of the Inner Temple leased mines in Griffe and Bedworth from the early 1620s.[28] Their attempts to make profits led to great conflicts with their neighbours and little apparent success. Frequently in the 1620s and 1630s the lessees of the adjoining mines (belonging to Coventry Corporation) complained to the Privy Council that Buggs and Robinson were flooding their pits with the water courses driven to drain the Bedworth mines, forcing the colliers: 'for haste and safeguard of their lives, some of them to climb the shaft and leave some of their clothes behind'.[29]

Drainage was a perennial problem of seventeenth-century mining and it is probable that, as the Privy Council believed, disputes over flooding, like others over rights of way, were caused mainly by the proximity of the various mining concerns.[30] Other accusations made by the lessees of Coventry's mines do indicate the competitive spirit engendered by risky

[25] Rowlands, *Masters and Men*, 8, 11, 93–5.

[26] P.R.O. SP16/204/83. Similar claims were made about the market for coal from the Newdigate manor of Griffe in 1657: W.C.R.O. CR136/C3774. Most sales went to the local Coventry-Nuneaton area, see A.W.A. White, *Men and Mining in Warwickshire* (Coventry and North Warwickshire History Pamphlets no. 7, 1970), 6. [27] SP16/204/83; E179/259/10.

[28] W.C.R.O. CR136/C866. *A.P.C. 1621–3*, 348.

[29] SP16/204/82 December 1631: report by the Warwickshire and Coventry J.P.s appointed by the Privy Council to examine the dispute.

[30] Examples of conflict over rights of way: *A.P.C. July 1628–April 1629*, no. 118 (August 1628); *A.P.C. May 1629–May 1630*, 288–9 (February 1630).

mining operations: the leases of the Coventry mines included an obligation to sell coal cheaply in the city and this caused resentment at the higher prices Buggs and Robinson were able to charge.[31] The lease of the Newdigate mines by Buggs and Robinson was seen as an attempt by them to buy up competitors; while the Earl of Dover accused them of 'enticing and inveigling' away his workmen.[32]

The 'middling sort' like Buggs and Robinson were not necessarily typical of those attracted to coal mining: Coventry merchants like Matthew Collins, local gentlemen like Edward Stratford of Nuneaton, Richard Chamberlain of Chilvers Coton and the Newdigates of Arbury were also involved; and, amongst the outsiders who leased the Coventry coal mines in the pre-Civil War period were the Earl of Dover, Sir Endymion Porter, Richard Knightley and John Pym.[33] One thing, at least, that they had in common was that they ran, as Edward Stratford said, 'a great hazard of ruin';[34] and such information as is available suggests that profits were rare and losses great. Within three and a half years of taking up the lease, the Earl of Dover was 18 months in arrears with his rent and his coal was seized by the corporation.[35] His successors, Knightley and Isaac Bromwich, complained in turn to the mayor of Coventry in November 1640: 'we are compelled to run upon two desperate conclusions either proceed at a vast charge and hazard, or else to give over and lose all'. Knightley's heir was very relieved when someone was found to take over the lease in 1646, claiming losses of £10,000 in the undertaking.[36] Even Thomas Robinson, perhaps the most determined and enterprising 'adventurer' in the Warwickshire coalfield, seems to have failed to recoup his investment: by 1640 he had been reduced to working as a manager for Edward Stratford, presumably because he could no longer finance an independent undertaking. Six months' accounts for Serjeant at Law, Richard Newdigate's pits in 1657 show a net profit of almost £50 for an outlay of £145, but it seems that these charges do not include initial costs like drainage and, as Newdigate was mining his own

[31] The agreements with Matthew Collins and other Coventry merchants in 1622, with the Earl of Dover in 1635, and with Isaac Bromwich, Richard Knightley and John Pym in 1639 all included such an obligation: Cov. C.R.O. A14a (Council Minute Book) ff.248r, 338r, 362r. For conflict caused by this see SP14/133/67–8 (1622), SP16/204/83 (1631).

[32] SP14/133/67–8; PC2/49/355 (July 1638).

[33] Collins *et al.*: Cov. C.R.O. A14a f.248r; Chamberlain and John Newdigate: P.R.O. PC2/42/84 (1630); Richard Newdigate: W.C.R.O. CR440/26 (1650s); Edward Stratford: J.U. Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry*, 2 vols. (1932), vol. 1: 442 (1640); W.C.R.O. CR440/25 (1650s); Dover and Porter: Cov. C.R.O. A14a f.338r (1635); Pym and Knightley: *ibid*, f.362r (1639).

[34] Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry*, vol. 2: 67, quoting a remark made in Chancery case, 1641. [35] Cov. C.R.O., A14a, f.356r, August 1638.

[36] Cov. C.R.O. A79 (letters), P204, P210A.

land, he did not, of course, have the rent charges of the other projectors.[37] The massive population growth in this area, the number of families in Bedworth itself increasing more than tenfold between 1563 and 1664 suggests that the coal industry expanded dramatically in spite of the risks involved. Like the Black Country, the coal parishes presented a discordant contrast to the more settled agricultural villages of the county. A great number of poor labourers, many of them recent immigrants or temporary settlers away from their families worked at a novel and risky occupation.[38] Their employers, too, were often newcomers or strangers, and were driven by technological problems and the desire to make profits towards attitudes and actions more sharply competitive than those generally considered acceptable.[39]

Despite the expansion of Birmingham and its own decline since the fifteenth century, the city of Coventry remained the largest manufacturing and commercial centre in the county. At the start of the sixteenth century Coventry had been one of the major regional centres of England, ranked fourth amongst provincial cities in the subsidies of 1523–7. In the 1520s, however, it had been hit by changes in the location, techniques and fashion of the woollen industry; and as Leland said: 'the town rose by the making of cloths and caps that now decaying the glory of the city decayeth'.[40] In 1635 the corporation, petitioning the Privy Council for an abatement in its ship money assessment, complained of: 'The great decay of trading in that city, visibly appearing as well by the number of shops there shut up as of houses untenanted, and the ruin of many houses.'[41] Although the corporation was obviously concerned here to maximise its plight, the relative decline in Coventry's prosperity is generally accepted. It was not until the end of the sixteenth century that Coventry recovered its population level of the 1510s, and the population was again stagnating at around 7,000 in the seventeenth century. In contrast to the 1520s Coventry ranked only eighteenth amongst provincial cities in the number of hearths on which it was assessed in 1662.[42]

The early seventeenth century saw frequent outbursts of social unrest in the city, probably because of its economic difficulties and the

[37] Nef, *The Rise of the British Coal Industry*, vol. 2: 422; W.C.R.O. CR440/26.

[38] In 1631 Buggs and Robinson claimed to the Privy Council that their pits provided work for the settled inhabitants of Bedworth whereas workmen at other pits 'have no families except in other countries whither they may again return' (P.R.O. SP16/204/83).

[39] Cf. coal mining in Durham: James, *Family, Lineage and Civil Society*, 91–6.

[40] W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (1959), 176; Peter Clark and Paul Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns* (1972), 10–11; E.G.R. Taylor 'Leland's England' in Darby, ed., *Historical Geography*, 330–53. Leland, *Itinerary*, vol. 2: 108.

[41] Cov. C.R.O. A35, 'This Booke touching Ship Money', no pagination.

[42] Hoskins, *Local History in England*, 177.

increasing domination of the city by a narrow oligarchy of aldermen and members of the First Council. In many English towns in this period access to political power became much harder, often in response to social and economic problems: power became concentrated in the hands of the most important guilds – close restrictions were put on entry into craft companies; corporation governing bodies became self-selecting.[43] In Coventry members of the Drapers, Mercers and Dyers Companies tended to monopolise power: seventeen out of twenty-three mayors of Coventry between 1620 and 1642 came from these groups. Under the 1621 Charter the First Council of the city recruited itself and this seemed to have strengthened an existing tendency towards the development of urban dynasties. The First Council was to consist of no more than thirty-one members, but in practice it usually numbered about fifteen, ten of whom were aldermen; and it was made up to thirty-one only to elect officers of the corporation. The second or Common Council of twenty-five was supposed to advise on matters referred to it by the First Council, but it never operated in this way. It seems to have served instead as an honorific stepping-stone towards membership of the First Council, especially for younger members of prominent families. A small interrelated group of families had several members as officers of the corporation, and sons tended to follow fathers on to the Common and First Councils, and as mayors and aldermen. John Barker, a draper, entered the First Council in April 1632 and became alderman of Jordanwell ward in November 1635, the year after he had been mayor. His father, also an alderman, had died in December 1634 and the younger Barker filled the first vacancy amongst the aldermen after the replacement of his father. Samson Hopkins and Christopher Davenport, admitted to the Council House in June 1639, were both the sons of former mayors and aldermen, and Hopkins' father had also been M.P. for the city in 1621.[44]

The will of William Jesson, an extremely wealthy dyer, reveals the cohesion amongst the leading Coventry families. Jesson was admitted to the council in 1629, Mayor in 1631, an alderman from 1634 and one of the city's M.P.s in the Long Parliament. His will included bequests to his

[43] Clark and Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns*, 16, 21–2.

[44] Frederick Smith, *Coventry: Six Hundred Years of Municipal Life* (Coventry, 1945), 88–91; A.A. Dibben, *Coventry City Charters* (Coventry City Papers, 2, 1969). The material on leading Coventry families is based on the Council Minute Book 1630–42: Cov. C.R.O. A14a; lists of Common Councillors ff.340r (1636), 370v (1640); membership of the First Council ff.343v (1636), 359v (1639). For Barker see ff.311v, 328r, 333v, for Hopkins and Davenport f.361r. There is a list of mayors in Benjamin Poole, *Coventry, Its History and Antiquities* (1870), 372. Developments in Coventry are broadly similar to those in Gloucester: Peter Clark, '"The Ramoth-Gilead of the Good": Urban Change and Political Radicalism at Gloucester 1540–1640' in Clark, A.G.R. Smith and N. Tyacke, eds., *The English Commonwealth 1547–1640: Essays in Politics and Society Presented to Joel Hurstfield* (Leicester, 1979), especially 177–8.